

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JIDDA 08153 201440Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 6621
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 8153

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, EAID, SY, SA
SUBJ: OIL STATES CONTINUE WITHHOLD AID FROM SYRIA

REF: DAMASCUS 8637

1. SUMMARY: SAG WE ARE QUITE SURE CONSIDERS
WELL-BEING OF PRESENT SYRIAN GOVT AS IMPORTANT TO SAG'S
OWN POLICIES. SAUDI INATTENTION TO SYRIA'S AID NEEDS
PERHAPS ATTRIBUTABLE TO SAG'S PREOCCUPATION WITH
PILGRIMAGE VISITORS, OPEC, AND LACK OF SYRIAN FOLLOW-
THROUGH AT HIGHEST LEVEL. IT MIGHT BE GOOD IDEA FOR
TOP-LEVEL SYRIAN APPEAL (MAYBE MORE THAN ONE) TO BE
MADE TO SAG. IF AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS BELIEVES SAG'S
CONTINUED INATTENTION COULD HAVE MALIGN PURPOSE, THIS
WOULD BE OF INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

2. FROM OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SAG ABOUT HOW IT
VIEWS THE SARG, ITS INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON, AND
RELATIONS WITH EGYPT, WE BELIEVE NOTHING COULD BE
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PAGE 02 JIDDA 08153 201440Z

FURTHER FROM THE MINDS OF SAUDI LEADERS THAN -- AS
MINECON IMADI MAY SUSPECT -- THAT SAUDI ARABIA (AMONG
THE PENINSULAR STATES) WAS SEEKING TO BRING ASAD DOWN.
IN THE LEBANESE CONFLICT, THE SAG HAS NOT MUCH
BOTHERED TO DISGUISE TO US ITS PARTIALITY FOR ASAD.
THE SAG KNOWS A CRISIS IN SYRIA MUST AFFECT THE SARG'S
ABILITY TO RESPOND TO ANYTHING US MIGHT PROPOSE IN

WAY OF NEW MIDDLE EAST EFFORT IN 1977. FOR THESE REASONS, WE HAVE NO DOUBT THE SAG CONTINUES TO REGARD THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT ASAD AS ONE WHICH MUST SURVIVE IF SAUDI HOPES FOR AN EARLY SOLUTION TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM ARE TO BE REALIZED.

3. AMEMBASSY JIDDA HAS OVER THE YEARS SOUGHT TO EXPEDITE MANY AID REQUESTS ON BEHALF OF THIRD PARTIES WHEN IT SEEMED IN OUR INTEREST TO DO SO. HOWEVER, IT HAS NEVER HELPED FOR THE USG TO GET OUT IN FRONT OF THE BENEFICIARY STATE, AND WE ARE NOT AT ALL SURE THAT SARG WOULD DESIRE THAT. SOMETIMES, HOWEVER, OUR FOLLOW-UP MAY HAVE KEPT A REQUEST FROM SLIPPING INTO THE SAUDI SUBCONSCIOUS. OUR UNINFORMED GUESS OF THE REASON FOR THE SAG'S CONTINUED SLOWNESS IN PAYING IS THAT IT MIGHT BE BECAUSE OF A LACK OF PERSISTENT, HIGH-LEVEL, AND PERSONAL FOLLOW-THROUGH BY PRESIDENT ASAD HIMSELF. WE FULLY SUPPORT AMBASSADOR MURPHY'S REMARKS (PARA 5 REFTEL) WHICH MAKES THIS SAME POINT.

4. THE SAG AT THE BEST OF TIMES IS SLOW TO MEET ITS FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS: A CUMBERSOME BUREAUCRACY MUST FUNNEL IMPORTANT DECISIONS UPWARD TO A VERY SMALL NUMBER OF DECISION-MAKING OFFICIALS WHOSE SCHEDULES ARE ALREADY OVER SUBSCRIBED. THIS CONDITION IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF THE TWO MONTHS OR SO SINCE THE RIYAH D CONFERENCE, WHILE THE TIDAL WAVE OF THE HAJ WASHED OVER SAUDI ARABIA, BRINGING WITH IT (AS AMBASSADOR MURPHY WILL RECALL) UNNUMBERABLE VISITORS
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PAGE 03 JIDDA 08153 201440Z

AND HUNDREDS OF FAVOR-SEEKERS, MANY AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL. THE OPEC CONFERENCE HAS ALSO BEEN A STRAIN. BEFORE WE HAVE A TRY AT THE SAG ON BEHALF OF SYRIA, THEREFORE, WE WOULD RECOMMEND TO MINISTER IMADI THAT THE SARG -- PERHAPS AT THE LEVEL OF PRESIDENT ASAD -- EXPLAIN SYRIA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS TO THE SAG.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE WOULD BE MOST INTERESTED IF AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IS AWARE OF ANY SPECIFIC CAUSE FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S INATTENTION TO SYRIA'S NEEDS FOR ASSISTANCE.
PORTER

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